

## WHAT SHOULD A BOY BE TAUGHT IN A PUBLIC SCHOOL?

**Business Men and Educators,  
Stirred By Mayor's Criticism  
of City Schools,  
Give Their Views.**

Mayor Gaynor's criticism of New York's present system of educating children, made in a talk before eleven men and women he had appointed to the Board of Education, startled many educators and delighted many men at the heads of big manufacturing and mercantile houses, who constantly meet trouble when they hire young folks from the schools.

The Mayor thinks there is an attempt to teach children too much; to give them a superficial knowledge of many things instead of accurate and thorough knowledge of a few things. He believes it is a mistake to teach foreign languages in the public schools, and says he has yet to find a child who learned a foreign language well enough in the New York schools to talk it.

Joel B. Goodman of the hosiery importing and commission firm of Goodman Bros., No. 463 Broadway, who is a neighbor of Mayor Gaynor in Brooklyn, voiced well the opinion of many employers of young men. He said: "I believe that for active life in commercial business and manufacturing a high school and college education is a handicap to a boy, because after such an education a young man does not want to do the actual work that is required of a young fellow starting in as a boy to learn a business. Of the Americans after the first generation who come to us from the schools to seek employment, eighteen out of every twenty want to start in office work. Who the Real Workers Are.

"If you want real workers you have to hire Russians or Italians who were perhaps born in the old countries and have a general smattering of how workers apply themselves there. They are willing to work, to start at the bottom, learn the business all the way up, and accept small wages at the start. They get the positions, do the work faithfully, and do not balk over drudgery. Eventually they make themselves so indispensable that they rise and are paid good salaries. It is part of a business man's education to know every detail of his business from the bottom up. That man sitting over there at that desk came into this business at the age of thirteen, worked, slaved, mastered one thing after another—and rose. Today he is married, has a family, is an important part of the business and a good citizen.

"A boy of thirteen or fourteen is impressionable and absorbs knowledge rapidly. It comes to him harder later on. If he is in the factory or store at that age he learns more rapidly the fundamentals than he goes after he has spent the next few

years in high school. When he comes from high school or college he has different ideals. He sees the drudgery and skirts it. Business is made up of horse sense and hard work.

"Take two boys of fourteen. They have the same mental make-ups and health. One goes into a business house as office boy—the other to high school. At eighteen the high school boy comes to begin where the other boy did four years before. The chances are he will never catch up. He sees the dirt. The other boy did not see it, and is now beyond it. Office positions seldom carry any advantage. They develop bookkeepers and statisticians. There is little further advancement. But the boy knowing the business from the bottom up gets to be a salesman, gets out on the road and finally has the knowledge to enable him to go into business for himself.

### Advantage of Early Start.

"The boy starting to work early is always more economical than the boy coming from school with a lot of fads and fells. Their tastes are entirely different. The boy beginning at the bottom early learns the exact value of a dollar by hard grinding work. He seldom forgets it. It would be more valuable to humanity if in our public schools more technical education was given to fit the boys and girls for the real work of life. If it is necessary for them to learn languages they will pick them up in business. Better that in their early years the pupils be drilled in the three R's till they know them thoroughly, and then, if they must go to school more, make their education technical."

Prof. George Drayton Strayer of Teachers' College, Columbia University, an authority, who has just published a book on "The Teaching Process," in which is included a chapter on the aim of education and another on the course of study, gave a new turn to the discussion by suggesting that this being a democracy the highest aim of education need not necessarily be to fit boys and girls to become mechanical money getters, but to enable them to get the greatest amount of happiness out of life. He said:

"The so-called newer subjects which have been introduced into the public school curriculum during the last fifteen or twenty years are there by virtue of the pressure which has been brought to bear upon the schools from those outside of the profession of education. Music, drawing, manual training and domestic science have been demanded by the public at large and are in the schools to stay because of this demand and because of the contribution which they make to what we may call a complete education.

**Aims of Education.**  
"As I view the problem, education should develop intelligence, provide children with proper habits, arouse

appreciations and develop power to work independently and economically. That part of our present school curriculum which does not directly count in enabling a child to make money may be the most important education we give. One of the most important problems in our present day democracy is that of the proper use of leisure time. The day laborer or the artisan has available a number of hours each day during which he is master of his own time. The work which we do in our schools in nature study, music, drawing, literature and history, none of which I believe are commonly included as among the three R's, ought to result in providing tastes which will mean the enjoyment of the nobler pleasures during leisure hours. The fact that we have not already achieved all we hope for in the teaching of these subjects is not a valid argument against giving them a place in the curriculum.

"The question of the relative success of boys who enter manufacturing and commercial pursuits with or without high school or college training, has been answered over and over again in our country by the success and contribution to public welfare of those who have received more than ordinary educational advantages. The leaders in any line of activity are, by virtue of their positions, charged with greater social responsibility. For the men who are to direct the energies and thought of the majority of our citizens a liberal education is essential. The whole movement during the past generation has been to increase the demand for liberal training for those who would enter the professions.

"Recently there has been provided technical training for those who are to enter manufacturing and mercantile pursuits. This provision for more adequate liberal training as a basis for special training is, I believe, a recognition on the part of our great leaders in education of the necessity for breadth of training for those who are to lead in any line of endeavor. Men of Unusual Powers.

"Of course there have been notable examples of men who have achieved success without superior educational advantages. A study of the lives of these men convinces us, however, that they succeeded not because they went into the factory or shop early in life, but rather because they were men of unusual powers who won an education often at very great cost to themselves in spite of the fact that they were unable to attend high school or college."

Joseph French Johnson, Dean of New York University's School of Commerce Accounts and Finance, said: "I talked to a young man on this very subject today—a young man in whom I am interested, and who has just come from a great technical school to enter upon the active battle of life. He is ready to begin as an electrical engineer. I said, 'Now you have got to get out and get a job. I do not want you to get any of your relatives to give you a job, and I don't want to get you a job myself. You are in the position of a fellow who has got to learn to play baseball. You may know all about the game from the bleachers. You may be a

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good fan. You may know how a great pitcher gives his famous curves. But when you go out on the field to play the game yourself you will learn you don't know how to play."

"I think Mayor Gaynor is right in what he says about there being too many subjects taught in school. He is right, generally speaking. The important thing about schooling is that it is only part of what the boy should get before he enters active life. He should learn to think clearly, and he can't if he is working on a lot of things. I'd rather a boy take up one thing and know it from A to Z than to keep up twenty and know them imperfectly, if at all.

### What a Boy Should Know.

"He should know how to spell accurately any word. He should know arithmetic thoroughly. And later English and the way of it. He should know a few important events in American history by heart. Now they go over a lot of things he doesn't grasp. The good thing about the old college education was that they nailed you down to three or four things and you had to know them. Every public man is asked to take part in a thousand enterprises. He cannot. He usually gives himself to a few and does good.

"I'd probably add to the high school training a very intensive study of American business, banking, the knowledge of them and of bonds and stocks. When the boy gets out into business if he goes at it from the bottom he knows all about it and becomes an expert. He gets a good salary. You can't go into a business and demand \$25 a week to start. We are teaching our young men now that they have got to do drudgery to master any calling in life. I went from college to work on the Springfield Republican and I knew how to write an essay. I wanted a good salary. They offered me \$3 a week to begin. Before I had been in that editorial room a week I learned I didn't know anything about writing.

"I was set to condensing the news from the Boston papers. There was a story about a boy who had accidentally hanged himself in a cellar. It was a good story, but the editor told me to write it down into a stick—two inches of space. It took me three hours to do it and then it had to be rewritten by somebody else. I hadn't had the technical training. I got it afterward. The colleges are now teaching business methods, corporation finance and business organization. It is a good thing and there should be more technical training in all the schools. But as for the difference between the high school training and the boy in the shop without it, the high school boy will end better, given equal natural aptitude."

Abraham Stern, leader of the Board of Education, said: "One of the things complained of by the Mayor is that the boys who leave school want to become bookkeepers and clerks and the girls want to be stenographers. How can we help what they become after leaving the schools? We are not teaching them trades nor how to dig in ditches. We don't pretend to do that. But we are teaching them the essentials of reading, writing and arithmetic and a few other things which will make them fairly good citizens.

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